ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

CHARITY HOSPITAL CARE IN TEXAS

In Texas, each non-profit hospital is required to provide a certain amount of free health care to people who have no health insurance or who cannot afford to pay for hospital care.

DO ALL HOSPITALS HAVE TO PROVIDE CHARITY CARE?

No. The law applies only to non-profit hospitals. For-profit hospitals are not included and public hospitals are already required to provide charity care. Under anti-dumping laws, all hospitals with emergency rooms must treat people who are diagnosed by licensed physicians as requiring emergency services, regardless of their ability to pay.

IT IS AN UNFORTUNATE FACT

that in Texas and throughout the United States, many people are uninsured and must rely on an overburdened public health system for the most basic health services. Public hospitals should not be the only institutions that bear responsibility for providing health care to the uninsured. Because of their general charitable mission and because of the public subsidies they receive through tax exemptions, non-profit hospitals also have this duty.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR CHARITY CARE?

Anyone can apply, but hospitals have a right to ask financial questions to determine eligibility. The eligibility criteria are set by the hospital within the limits of the law and are based on a patient's ability to pay. Applicants are responsible for providing necessary financial information in a timely manner.

CAN I BE CHARGED AN APPLICATION FEE?

The application must be offered free of charge.

DO HOSPITAL CHARITY PROGRAMS APPLY ONLY TO EMERGENCY ROOM CARE?

No. Hospitals also offer this program in clinics and non-emergency hospital admissions.

WHAT IF THE HOSPITAL DOES NOT TELL ME ABOUT ITS CHARITY CARE PROGRAM AND I FIND OUT LATER THAT IT HAS ONE? CAN I STILL APPLY FOR CHARITY CARE?

Yes. You can request financial assistance at any point—even after being billed by the hospital or a collection agency. Remember, a hospital is required to tell you about its charity care program and how to apply. If the hospital fails to tell you about the program, please contact the Office of the Attorney General.

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

HOW LONG CAN I RECEIVE THIS CARE?

You can receive care as long as you still meet the hospital criteria.

DO HOSPITAL CHARITY CARE PROGRAMS TAKE THE PLACE OF HEALTH INSURANCE, MEDICARE OR MEDICAID?

No. These programs are not a substitute for health insurance or for any government health assistance programs. Hospitals will usually accept insurance first (including Medicaid or Medicare) and provide care under this program only if you have no insurance and cannot afford to pay.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY LOCAL HOSPITAL HAS A CHARITY CARE PROGRAM?

If your hospital is non-profit, information about the charity care program must be posted in the emergency room, general waiting areas, the business office and other visible locations. If you are unsure whether a hospital offers charity care, ask an admissions clerk.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT IS REQUIRED.

All non-profit hospitals must prepare community benefit plans that state how identified community needs will be addressed. The community benefit plans must be reported to the Texas Department of Health (TDH). You can obtain a copy of this report from TDH or the hospital.

PUBLIC INPUT

Hospitals must solicit input from the community when developing the community benefits plan.

TO FILE A COMPLAINT OR ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT A PARTICULAR HOSPITAL, CONTACT:

Office of the Attorney General
Consumer Protection Division
Charitable Trusts Section
P. O. Box 12548
Austin, TX 78711-2548
(800) 621-0508

FOR A COPY OF A HOSPITAL'S COMMUNITY BENEFITS PLAN AND REPORT OF AMOUNT OF CHARITY CARE PROVIDED, CONTACT:

The Bureau of State Health Data and Policy Analysis
Texas Department of Health
1100 W. 49th St.
Austin, TX 78756
(512) 458-7261

CONTACT INFORMATION

BY US MAIL

Office of the Attorney General
Consumer Protection Division/010
P. O. Box 12548
Austin, Texas 78711-2548

ON THE INTERNET

www.oag.state.tx.us

BY TELEPHONE

Main agency switchboard
(512) 463-2100
Consumer Protection Division
1-800-621-0508
or Regional Offices
Austin • 512-463-2070
Dallas • 214-969-5310
El Paso • 915-834-5800
Houston • 713-223-5886
Lubbock • 806-747-5238
McAllen • 956-682-4547
San Antonio • 210-224-1007

PUBLIC INFORMATION & ASSISTANCE

(512) 463-2007
(800) 252-8011